

Georgetown Council on Aging FY22 Annual Report

In our fifth year at the Georgetown Senior Community Center, the lifting of state and local COVID-19 emergency orders allowed the Georgetown Council on Aging (COA) to focus on how best to resume programs and activities as well as what additional or changes in services were needed in response to the evolving pandemic. Recognizing the multi-faceted affects the COVID-19 pandemic had on individuals within the community, much of the COA's work in FY22 focused on individuals' mental and physical health. Case management and outreach services for individuals continued to see an increase. Managing and responding to changes in public health protocol, in-person activities at the Georgetown Senior Community Center resumed with phased-in schedules while programs such as SHINE or the AARP Income Tax Preparation Program continued by telephone or with a hybrid plan. While maintaining participation limits, pre-registration and other COVID-19 safety protocol, the COA has been able to resume most of the in-person programs and activities that have made the Georgetown Senior Community Center a vital and engaging community facility. The Grab and Go Lunch Program, which also includes several daily home deliveries, continued to see significant increases. Staff members assisted consumers in scheduling COVID-19 booster vaccines as well as ordering or distributing COVID-19 home testing kits, much of which were provided to the COA without charge by AgeSpan. The continued pandemic highlights the need for essential services as well as the need for flexible and evolving programs as COA staff continues to respond and support consumers and their families during these changing times.

In Fiscal Year 2022, board members and their positions included: Sue Clay Chair; Vice Chair; Darcy Norton, Secretary Jill Benas; Esther Palardy; Diane Prescott, Jean Perley, Diane Klibansky, Jeanne Robertson, Martha Lucius and as well as Alternate Board Member Marie Collins. Council on Aging staff members in FY22 included Director Colleen Ranshaw-Fiorello, Outreach Worker Kirsten Klueber, Administrative Assistant Julie Pasquale, Van Driver David Hall, Meal Site Supervisor Michelle Muise and Meal Site Assistant Esther Palardy.

In partnership with AgeSpan, the Georgetown COA served 83 consumers 5,640 times in our Grab and Go Program, a 94 percent increase from FY21. Some consumers drive to the Georgetown Senior Community Center to pick up their lunches while COA Staff continue to deliver lunches to some consumers at their homes. An additional partnership with AgeSpan provides 27 monthly 26 Elder Brown Bag food packages that COA Staff deliver to elder households and other adults living with disabilities. AgeSpan also continues to deliver Home Delivered Meals (HDM) and responds quickly to referrals for additional consumers. Delivering the monthly Brown Bag food packages provides the COA with an additional opportunity to connect with consumers who utilize the COA Marketplace, often allowing the COA to deliver more food to consumers as needed. In FY 22, the COA Marketplace served 53 older adults 264 times, an increase in the amount of duplicated participation from FY21. Funded with community donations, the COA delivered 773 Sunshine Bags along with food pantry and Elder Brown Bag deliveries, an additional 200 bags from the previous year. The Kiwanis Club was able to hold resume their community Thanksgiving Dinner and COA Staff delivered 60 holiday dinners to older adults at home.

Along with delivering monthly food packages to individual consumers, the COA Van program has seen an increase in providing people with grocery shopping and other essential errands (Post Office, banks, pharmacies). This year, 11 participants were provided with 546 round trips and shopping assistance. The COA Van is available twice per week and the driver cleans the van before and after the ride, following public health protocol. For the first several months of FY22, the COA's SHINE Counselor and Veterans' Services Director scheduled telephone appointments with consumers but moved to individual in-person appointments in April. The SHINE Counselor served 60 consumers 77 times in FY22, a 28 percent increase from FY21. The Veterans' Services Director also served 16 individuals in FY22.

As a demonstration of true community spirit during difficult times, the COA continues to receive wonderful donations to the COA Marketplace (Food Pantry) allowing the staff to make deliveries to individuals as needed. In FY22, the COA saw a 20 percent increase in the COA Marketplace with 50 individuals served 243 times. The COA also continues to lend durable medical equipment, delivering to individual homes. In the past year, the COA provided 41 individuals with 71 pieces of medical equipment. The equipment is cleaned before it is delivered, then cleaned after it is returned and quarantined for three days before it is lent again.

As a result of working through the pandemic and providing people at the Georgetown Senior Community Center with flexible programs and activities, the number of duplicated individuals served by COA programs and services increased from 9,183 in FY 21 to 17,321 in FY 22, representing an 87 percent increase. The increase in the duplicated elder count provides evidence that the Georgetown Council on Aging has a strong connection to individuals in the community. During this past year, the COA saw the increase in case management noted last year remain consistent with 237 individuals served 736 times. The COA continues to see unduplicated non-elders seeking services such as support and assistance with food resources, fuel assistance, and transportation as well as case management support for complex clients living with a variety of physical and psycho/social needs. The increase in services to both demographics provides evidence that COA is often the only social service agency in the community and functions as a gateway to other services for both elders and non-elders.

As an example of community partnership and grass-roots effort, the Trustees of the Perley Free School again provided a fuel assistance program to local residents who experience difficulty with heating costs. In addition to the money that is used to fund scholarships for Georgetown graduates and alumnae, the Trustees oversee a small endowment to aid Georgetown residents facing financial hardships. Concerned for people who may have difficulty with heating costs, the Trustees continued the plan for a limited heating assistance program for a seventh year. Often filling the gap for people whose income might be slightly higher than the limits required by Community Action and other programs, the Trustees provided four individuals with heating assistance during FY22.

The support of Crosby's Marketplace, a local grocery store, as a sponsor for our monthly Men's Breakfast program further illustrates the strength of the COA's partnerships within the community. After the program resumed in October 2021, the group averaged 15 men per month for a total of 135 men over the nine-month period. As an important opportunity to share a nutritious meal with friends, the program also provides the COA with an opportunity to develop

relationships with men in the community. Since the program was established in 2007, the COA has been able to identify and address specific needs for individual men. Along with a nutritious breakfast for the participants, speakers are planned for the monthly program. Topics range from health and wellness, Medicare, retirement, Veterans' issues, current events, town government, home and personal safety, and local history. Acknowledging and supporting the importance of the program to the men served, Crosby's Marketplace will again sponsor the program in FY23.

After providing an innovative hybrid program during the FY21 income tax preparation season, the Association for the Advancement of Retired People (AARP) was able to provide a flexible limited contact program during FY22 that served 115 individuals. Scheduling appointments to drop off and then pick-up income tax documents in an open portion of the building, three volunteer Tax Aides prepared state and federal tax returns for 111 unduplicated older individuals and served 3 unduplicated non-elders in FY22. Along with income tax preparation, the Tax Aides provide participants with information regarding the state's Circuit Breaker Tax Credit and helped resolve individual issues with the state Department of Revenue including requests for additional verification from elders which often occurs as a result of elders filing the Circuit Breaker Tax Credit.

The Georgetown and Merrimac Councils on Aging continue to share an eight-passenger van as part of a regional transportation plan. Funded with a grant from the state Department of Transportation's Mobility Assistance Program, the van is leased from the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA) and provides a vital link to needed services for elders and disabled individuals in Georgetown and Merrimac. To support independence and the goal of aging in place, the COA van traveled 2,434 miles in FY22 providing 11 individuals with 546 weekly shopping trips.

Resuming service in October, three volunteer drivers serving through Northern Essex Elder Transportation (NEET), Inc. supplied 8 elders with 13 round-trip out-of-town medical appointments. The three volunteer drivers with the NEET program donated approximately 13 hours driving a total of 476 miles to provide the 8 elders with transportation to their medical appointments during FY22. In addition to the challenge of aging volunteers, the safety concerns during the pandemic have had an impact on drivers and consumers connected with the NEET program. However, the transportation service continues to be meaningful to those served as well as to the volunteers who provide the service.

To further address elder transportation needs, the COA staff also provides elders with information and referrals to the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority's (MVRTA) Ring and Ride transportation service. Using wheelchair lift-equipped MVRTA vehicles, the Ring and Ride program provides Georgetown residents with free curb-to-curb transportation to anywhere in Amesbury, Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen, Newbury/Byfield, Newburyport, North Andover and West Newbury as well as to the Rowley Commuter Rail Station and Market Basket. Fortunately, the MVRTA program has been able to continue service with protocols during the pandemic. The COA staff also provides clients with information and referrals to the MVRTA's Medi-Ride Medical Service as well as the Mass Health Transportation Program, if eligible.

Using pre-registered and limited class sizes, the COA began to hold in-person fitness classes in June 2021 adding additional classes during the first quarter of FY22. Yoga, strength training, Tai Chi and a hybrid exercise class were all able to resume by the end of the fall. An outdoor recreational pickle-ball group began to play indoors at the Senior Center during the winter. Open to one or two participants at a time, the COA's Fitness Center also saw increased use during FY22. With fitness opportunities ranging from classes and groups to individual fitness equipment use, 81 older adults exercised 2,500 times at the Senior Center in FY22. With the resumption of in-person programs, more individual older adults began to spend more time participating in programs and activities on a weekly basis. After class coffee has provided increased opportunities for socialization and additional participation in COA programs and services.

During the pandemic and until April 2022 when in-person appointments resumed, a SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) Counselor continued to provide consumers with health insurance information and support by telephone. The SHINE Counselor and COA Director often work together to provide clients with a higher level of service, sometimes meeting together or separately to assist clients with health insurance, prescription drug insurance or to provide assistance in completing state or Federal program applications. The meetings often lead to additional outreach opportunities for the COA with the clients. During the past year, the SHINE counselor and COA Director met with 60 consumers 77 times in FY22 providing assistance with Medicare, Medigap policies, prescription drug plans and other health insurance issues. The COA has continued to see an increase in the number of younger elders seeking supplementary health insurance information as they reach 65 years and plan health insurance for retirement. This trend provides evidence to support the theory that a steadily increasing elder population within the community will generate a greater demand for services within the community.

The monthly blood pressure clinics provided by the Board of Health were able to resume in January 2022. During the last six months of FY22, the Public Health Nurse served 9 individuals 22 times with blood pressure assessments. The COA and Board of Health did resume the annual flu clinic in November, using pre-scheduled appointments. Thirty individuals were served at the flu clinic. The COA Van also provided transportation for other individuals who planned flu vaccines in the community. Continuing during the pandemic's shut-down and while the Senior Center was closed to the public, the COA's Durable Medical Lending Program loaned 75 pieces of medical equipment to 44 unduplicated elders this year, an increase from the past year. Seven pieces of durable medical equipment were loaned to three non-elders this past year.

Both the Georgetown Police and Fire Departments continue to provide important safety programs along with support for any potential protective service case. The Georgetown Fire Department successfully applied for a grant program that allowed the purchase and installation of a number of Lock Boxes and Smoke Detectors throughout the community. In FY22, the Lock Box Program served five elders while the Smoke Detector Program served seven elders. A grant for the new fiscal year is in place and the program will continue. Now that in-person programs have been resumed, plans are in place for both the Georgetown Police and Fire Departments to present community education programs at the Senior Center. The community education programs will be televised allowing the information to reach a greater portion of the community.

In FY22, the COA received 3,035 telephone calls and requests for information, assistance and referrals from elders this year. Responding to requests for support and assistance with food resources, fuel assistance, transportation as well as support for complex clients living with a variety of physical and psycho/social needs, the COA served 237 unduplicated elders and 736 duplicated elders with case management and advocacy in FY22. The steady increase in the unduplicated elders served this past year supports the position that the Senior Center will continue to see more older adults in need of support, even as the pandemic becomes endemic. In providing case management services, the COA maintains a confidential client file with emergency contact information on each elder served as well as ongoing progress notes on specific elders who receive case management services. In addition to home visits and office appointments, ongoing client support is provided with daily reassurance calls to frail and homebound elders. In FY22, 559 reassurance/wellbeing calls were made to 143 elders, a wellness check that often led to the identification of other case management needs. With the assistance of several volunteers, the COA provided additional outreach within the community, by writing 100 sympathy, get well, thank you and thinking of you notes to local elders and family members.

As a result of the pandemic, a team of volunteers now work from their homes to collate, fold and label the COA's monthly newsletter so that it can be mailed to 7,859 households, an important outreach in FY22. In addition to mailing or delivering the newsletter to public locations, the newsletter is updated each month on the Town's website. To further strengthen the COA's community outreach, I continue to write press releases for local newspapers and cable television and update the Town's website and Facebook page on a frequent basis. Along with posting information on the Cable TV community bulletin board, the Cable TV station has continued to broadcast previously recorded programs on the local Cable TV community access station, allowing information related to elder programs and services to reach a greater audience within the Town during the continued pandemic. This year, four local newspapers published more than 40 press releases, photographs and letters to the editor publicizing COA programs and activities.

Based on state and local demographic information, I anticipate that the Georgetown COA and Georgetown Senior Community Center will continue to see an increase in the demand for services to support elders living in the community as a result of the increase in elder population. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the population of elders over the age of 65 years is 1,385 while the population over 60 years is estimated in 2018 to be 1,694, a 19 percent increase from the 1,427 over 60 population in 2010. However, the 2022 local residents' age list shows that 2,303 elders over the age of 60 live in Georgetown, which represents 27 percent of the town's population. The local demographic information supports the population projections presented by the UMass Donahue Institute of Economic and Public Policy Research Institute which estimated that the elder population in Georgetown would be 2,158 in 2020 and 2,922 in 2030. Each month prior to the pandemic, growth was noted in the Georgetown COA statistics and has continued to occur as the COA resumed in-person programs and activities. An analysis of FY21 statistics found that the growth in COA services and programs was primarily seen in case management, outreach, Income Tax preparation, the Grab and Go Lunch program, food pantry and health education including COVID-19 information, vaccine information and vaccine scheduling, all services that reflect assistance in maintaining elder independence. Growth was also seen in the Senior Center's recreation and socialization programs. The analysis provides evidence to support

the important role that the Council on Aging and Georgetown Senior Community Center play in supporting and enhancing the safety, wellness and independence of older adults living in the community. As the Georgetown Senior Community Center continues to evolve in the post-pandemic world, the Georgetown COA anticipates future growth in all areas of the COA's overall program as well as the supportive services offered at the Georgetown Senior Community Center.

The Friends of the Council on Aging group continue to increase community support and raise awareness for the COA's mission of serving elders and their families in the community. Along with raising "friends" for the COA, the on-going clothing and textile collection bin located at the Perley School has raised funds for Council on Aging programs and services. The group has been active in supporting and helping to facilitate programs such as the Women's Breakfast, socialization activities and special teas at the Georgetown Senior Community Center. The COA donation account has also gratefully received several gifts from residents and participants which have been used to support COA programs and activities as well as the COA Marketplace.

The COA thanks the Kiwanis, the local Boy and Girl Scout troops, the Georgetown School Department, Georgetown Cultural Council, Crosby's Marketplace, the Trustees of the Perley Free School, Nunan Florist and Greenhouses, the Friends of the Georgetown Council on Aging, as well as the Town departments including the Georgetown Housing Authority, and the Georgetown Police and Fire Department for their continued support during the past fiscal year. With deep appreciation, the COA thanks the more than 50 volunteers who serve as board members, volunteer drivers, program assistants, newsletter production crew, office support and volunteers during special events when the Georgetown Senior Community Center is open. Providing the Georgetown COA with more than 2,000 hours of volunteer service this past fiscal year, an estimated value of \$60,000, their hours of service are a valuable asset as well as a significant savings to the town. Not only are they a valuable resource and support to the COA, but they make a real and tangible difference in the lives they touch. Their support is essential to the COA's mission of serving elders and others in the community.